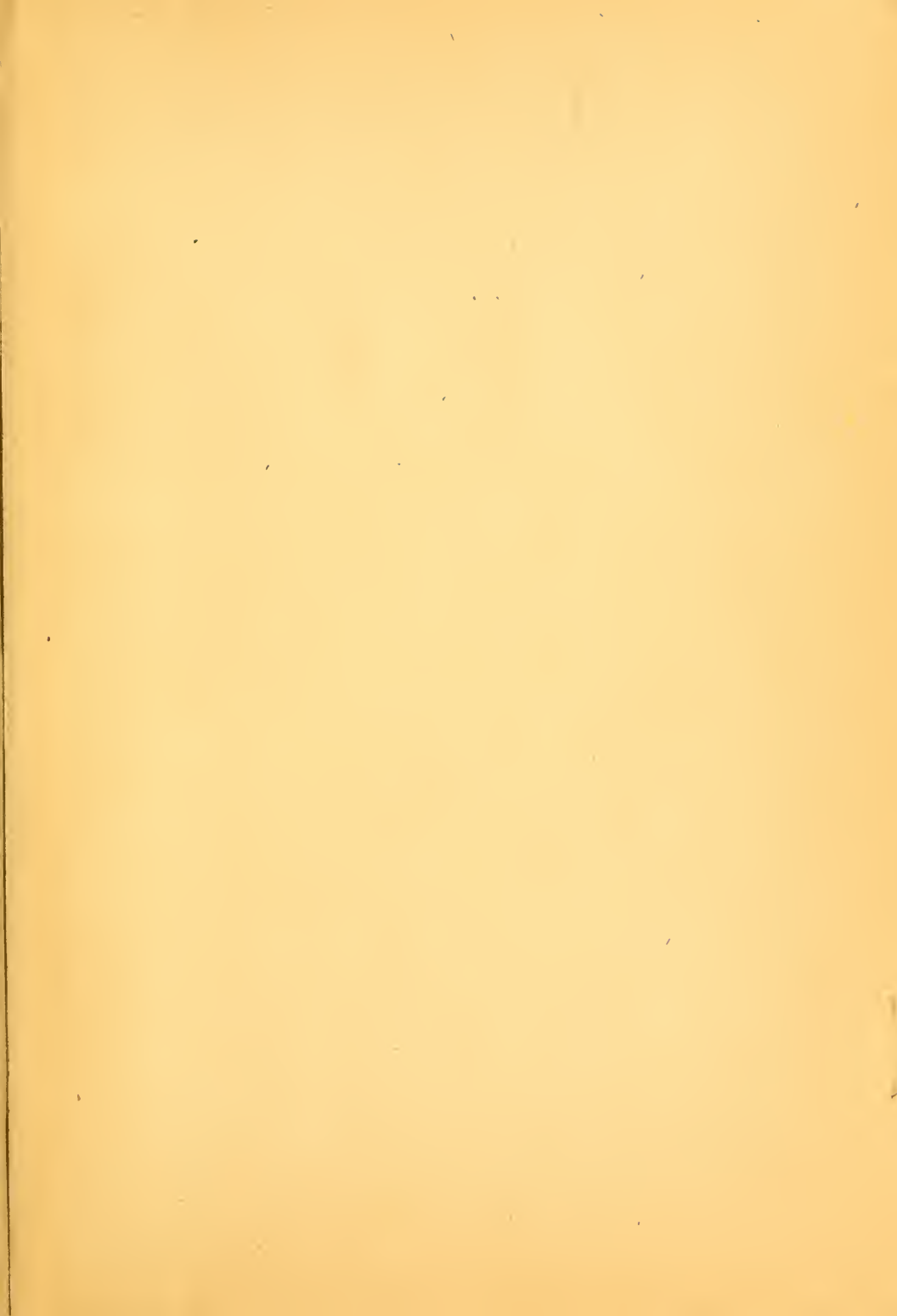


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# Buchanan's Administration

ON THE

## Eve of the Rebellion

A Paper Read

before

The Cliosophic Society

Lancaster, Pa., January 24, 1908

by

W. U. Hensel

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"It is Easy to be Wise After the Event."

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MRS. WOODROW WILSON  
NOV. 25, 1939

# Buchanan's Administration on the Eve of the Rebellion.

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MR. CHAIRMAN, MEMBERS OF THE PHILOSOPHIC SOCIETY AND  
GUESTS :

We have so far progressed with the development and discussion of the topic for the present Clio season as to easily recognize and fully appreciate its comprehensive character. A half century of history, during a period so pregnant with great events, testing the very unity of our nation and the endurance of its institutions, under changes of the most revolutionary character, has been made the subject of many thousands of volumes of historical narration and philosophic discussion. In contemplating even the outside of them, one is at some loss to determine whether the telescopic or the microscopic system of investigation is the more satisfactory treatment for the purposes of this Society's entertainment—not to say its instruction—whether the spectacular contemplation of the panorama or the perhaps more tedious study of the miniature is nearer to your tastes and more conformable to your temper.

Howbeit no considerable figure in the period of political stress and storm which marked the agitation of the slavery issue and collateral questions can be fairly treated, as to the events of his life, the relation to his times and contemporaries, his place in the final judgment of history and in the last analysis of patriotic character and motive, within the limits of a sixty-minute paper.

For myself, I incline, from the observation and experience of many years, to the opinion that the range of our studies should be narrowed and focussed, and the subject of a single

winter could be better comprehended and more satisfactorily handled within a short space of time; that they should center in the life and influence of some single conspicuous historical personage, the works, if not the work of a great creative genius, or revolve about one epoch in the life of our own or the history of some other nation.

For many reasons I shall confine my treatment of Mr. Buchanan's public career and his attitude toward public questions to that closing period of his administration and of his official life which intervened the election and inauguration of his successor; only contrasting his executive aims and acts with those of Mr. Lincoln at the outset of the latter's term, when the conditions were most nearly corresponding.

I shall assume that the main events of his life are familiar to any Lancaster audience—his pre-eminent ability as a lawyer, his long experience and signal services in the many places of public trust he held; his unsullied private character and unquestioned personal integrity; his almost continuous discharge of high official duties through the many years in which he rose from the rank of State legislator, through service as representative, diplomat, senator, secretary of state and ambassador, to the highest office under our government—advancing to the place by those gradations of experience, once familiar and common, but known no longer in our political system; since now—for better or for worse—canned statesmanship, like condensed food and preserved music, are furnished to order, on short notice and ready for immediate use—accepted generally for the gaudiness of the label rather than on the merits of the contents.

Herbert Spencer, in "Man versus The State," observes that "unquestionably among monstrous beliefs one of the most monstrous is that while for a simple handicraft such

as shoemaking a long apprenticeship is needful, the sole thing which needs *no* apprenticeship is making a nation's laws." Mr. Buchanan was not made president by reason of any such popular or party delusion. In reaching that place he only came to his own.

Moreover, had he realized his sincere belief that the notable decision of the Supreme Court upon the slavery question, which was almost contemporaneous with his inauguration, would have been accepted by people and politicians as the decisive judgment of the supreme federal tribunal, upon the question of then greatest federal and popular concern, it may easily be conceived his administration and himself would have gone down to history as identified with one of the most notable executive terms since the beginning of the government. Mr. Bryce, the most far-sighted and fair-minded foreign critic of our institutions, and Mr. Rhodes, probably the most accurate historian of the period he treats, agree that our material progress during 1850-60 was greater than that of any preceding decade; and the American gives many illustrations of the tremendous advances in the intellectual, social and moral state of the people of that time.

Again, had success attended the earnest efforts of those who so strenuously sought to avert war in 1861; had the vigorously pressed Crittenden measures of compromise been adopted and accepted; or had Virginia's effort to save the Union—accepted by twenty-one states who composed the Peace Congress, presided over by one who had been President of the Republic—had this or any like movement prevailed, the Buchanan administration would have been signalized as marking at once the most awful crisis and the safest deliverance in all our internal history; and the sunset of his political life would have been irradiated with the "gold and glory of a perfect day."

## THE VERDICT OF HISTORY.

As it happened, I only record what is the overwhelming and apparently fixed conclusion of by far the greater number of the historic writers of this period, that his administration was inglorious and feeble, that it failed where it ought to have succeeded, and that this was largely due to the weakness of the executive head, if not to his actual lack of patriotism.

I believe it is the sincere belief of a great majority of even the intelligent people of this country who have honestly tried to study its history, that Mr. Buchanan, as president, at the outbreak of the secession movement, was a weak, timid, old man; who had gained his place by the favor of, if not through the bargain with, an arrogant, unscrupulous, slaveholding oligarchy of the South; that he was an accessory after, if not before, the fact, to the plot of a partisan majority of the Supreme Court to withhold the Dred Scott decision until after his election and then make it cover a point not vital to it, for unscrupulous political purposes; that he was the tool of crafty Southern leaders, who used him and his cabinet to bring to successful issue long predetermined plans to break up the Union; that in the development of these, he permitted, if he did not connive at, the weakening, scattering and disintegrating of the armed forces of federal power on land and sea, the distribution throughout the Southern States of great and disproportionate quantities of muskets, rifles and cannon, so that the impending Confederacy might have a long start on the Union forces in physical preparation for armed conflict; that he obstructed Congress in its efforts to avert rebellion and war, or to properly, promptly and effectively meet it when declared; that he drooped the colors of presidential dignity when he treated the envoys of

defiant rebellion with a consideration due only to foreign ambassadors; that he parleyed over the re-inforcement of federal forces in government forts until the Confederates could rally enough troops to capture them; that he repudiated the right to assert some existing constitutional executive power to levy war against a rebellious state government or the people of a rebellious commonwealth; and that when he quit the office, March 4, 1861, he was succeeded by a firm, resolute, patriotic successor, whose policies, methods and executive acts, in striking contrast with, and immediate reversal of, Mr. Buchanan's, asserted the proper presidential prerogative, antagonized rebels, roused patriotism, re-inforced forts, inspired Congress, raised armies, established national credit, waged war; and, with a combination of Jefferson's statesmanship, Jackson's courage, Washington's patriotism, Hamilton's skill and Webster's enthusiasm, after four years of civil war, the expenditure of ten billions of treasure and the loss of a half million human lives, accomplished what Mr. Buchanan could have done bloodlessly and economically had he not been a dotard or a traitor!

I cannot reasonably quarrel with the young student who, off-hand, accepts these conclusions; nor with a younger generation, who find it more convenient—even though more unjust—to adopt than to dispute or dislodge them.

Although nowadays we pay only one or two cents for a morning or evening newspaper, we are unreasonable enough to expect that what is printed therein, so far as it purports to be news and a narration of facts, has been gathered at the expense of its readers and patrons, with some regard for truth and accuracy. None of us has the time or the money to verify the same. Nevertheless, as we so often find that what is published regarding the things of which we have some knowledge is grossly inaccurate, unreliable and untruthful, we would also find, had we the means to



test it, a vast deal of what passes for "a brief abstract and chronicle of the time" to be merely the "baseless fabric of a vision." So if the touchstone of historical truth be applied to much that the history makers have set down as established fact or invincible opinion, it will be found to be unsupported by testimony and unsustainable by fair argument.

### MR. BUCHANAN'S CRITICS.

Thus in the elaborate and voluminous Albert Bushnell Hart series, "The American Nation," Prof. Smith, in the volume on "Parties and Slavery," dismisses Buchanan with the curt criticism: "No president has a record of more hopeless ill success." Chadwick, in his "Causes of the Civil War," in the same series, speaks of him as a weak "old man," surrounded by traitorous counsellors and afraid to do the duty which was plain before him.

Schouler, in his five-volume history of the United States of America, "Under the Constitution," which period he seems to think begins with the Revolution and ends with the Civil War, complains that in 1860-1 the country lacked an executive who made "a bold and manly stand," "a free avowal that the Union must be preserved and the laws of the land obeyed." This he blithely declares "would have relieved the gloom and despondency which was already gathering in business circles," etc.; and he dismisses the subject by re-echoing what he calls "the spontaneous cry of conscience Democrats": "Oh! for an hour of Jackson." In the language of the street, however, he "gives himself away" by confessing that the weak point in our system is that which kept the government's resources sequestered for four months "after the people had declared their will, in control of an administration and Congress defeated at the polls." As a historian, he makes nothing by trying to



shift the blame for the forwardness of the Confederate cause from Buchanan to Congress; for he should have known, if he is a true historian, that the Congress which met one month after Lincoln's election was a Republican Congress, organized and controlled by the political opposition to Mr. Buchanan, and from December 3, 1860, when it met, until March 4, 1861, when it expired, it never passed an act nor did a deed in support of Buchanan's efforts to avert war or to suppress the incipient rebellion. And though the next Congress, elected in 1860, and overwhelmingly Republican, could have been called into extra session March 5, 1861, no effort was made by the incoming Republican administration to assemble it until July 4, 1861—nearly three months after the flag had been fired upon.

Mr. Rhodes, who makes a resolute and in the main as successful an effort to be fair as anyone with his strong bias can be, clings to the view that Buchanan was "lame and apologetic" and by his executive headship so far dominated Dix, Black, Stanton and Holt, of his Cabinet, as to prevent a policy of "vigorous defense prompted by strong patriotic and national sentiments." John A. Logan, who of course is entitled to no rank as a historian or political philosopher, but whose opinion is significant because (Saul-of-Tarsus-like) he was converted over night from a pro-slavery Democrat to a red-mouthed Republican, and was seriously considered—by himself at least—as a presidential possibility, speaks of the Buchanan outfit, in his "Great Conspiracy," as "an imbecile administration, which stood with dejected mien and folded hands helplessly awaiting the coming catastrophe." Gen. Benj. F. Butler, who had voted fifty-seven times for Jefferson Davis as the fit Democratic nominee for president of the United States, has recalled in "his book" how the question of secession could have been settled and "life and treasure incalculable" saved

had Buchanan accepted his advice and arrested the Secession Commissioners for treason. As Mr. Buchanan's successor had the benefit of Gen. Butler's services, civil and military, and as all political parties had his help at one time, and his opposition at another, it probably may not be quite fair to quote him as authority on any side of any question.

Mr. Blaine, who possesses some of the consistent qualities of a genuine historical critic, even of politics, considers that Mr. Buchanan lacked will, fortitude and moral courage; and professes to believe that if he had possessed "the unconquerable will of Jackson or the stubborn courage of Taylor he could have changed the history of the revolt against the Union." John Sherman recalls in his "Recollections" with manifest self-satisfaction that he wrote, in December, 1860, "Treason sits in the councils and timidity controls the executive power;" and, commenting in 1895, on Mr. Buchanan's attitude, he characterizes it as "feebleness, vacillation and dishonor." Schurz denounces him as "the most miserable presidential figure in American history." Mr. Elson, whose work is probably the best of all the single-volume histories, calls him "a weak and vacillating president."

Noah Brooks, in his life of Lincoln, stigmatizes his predecessor as cowardly, senile and vacillating, because he did not stamp out secession and reinforce Fort Sumter. John T. Morse, who has carefully excluded Buchanan from his "American Statesman Series," though it comprises many men of much inferior rank, arraigns him bitterly in the life of Lincoln, which he himself wrote; and yet page after page of it discredits his own estimate.

I could multiply these citations almost without limit. Let it suffice to recall that Horace Greely, the very rankest of disunionists, in his "Recollections," finds it impossible

to reconcile Mr. Buchanan's conduct at the initial stages of the rebellion with any other hypothesis than that of "secret pledges made by him, or for him, to the Southern leaders, when he was an aspirant to the presidency, that fettered and paralyzed him when they perverted the power enjoyed by them, as members of his cabinet, to the disruption and overthrow of the Union."

### AN UNJUST JUDGMENT.

I recall these opinions and I cite this very general judgment of contemporary history for the purpose of demonstrating that they are unhistorical, unjudicial, untrue, unjust and cruel. The subject affords fresh illustration of how easily Error and Falsehood can outrun Justice and Truth in a short race. A very brief examination into the facts of the case will, on the other hand, demonstrate how simple it is for those who earnestly desire and honestly strive to get at the truth to ascertain and grasp it.

From the same authorities whose opinions I have quoted I reach and undertake to sustain certain conclusions of fact which utterly subvert, undermine and reverse these false and mistaken judgments. From their own admissions it is manifest that Mr. Buchanan was no more of a disunionist than Mr. Lincoln, and not nearly so much of one as Seward, Greeley, Beecher or Wendell Phillips; that the doctrine of secession, the right of a State to withdraw from the Federal Union, was not solely indigenous to the South; that the views of the Buchanan administration on the constitutional right of the executive to coerce a seceding state, or to make war on its people, were exactly those then held by substantially all the great lawyers, judges and statesmen of the country, including Abraham Lincoln; that there was no spoliation of the public treasury, no apportionment of the federal military equipment, nor dispersion of the navy in

the interest of any particular section; that in his efforts to maintain peace and prevent dismemberment of the Union, Mr. Buchanan was more aggressive, positive and definite than was Mr. Lincoln at the time; that his Secretary of State, during the time the secession movement was organizing, was more courageous and determined than Mr. Lincoln's premier, even after rebellion became far more defiant and threatening; that the attitude of Lincoln's administration toward the Confederate agents of peace was more conciliatory than Buchanan's; that in his efforts to preserve peace and effect a compromise, Mr. Buchanan had the encouragement and support of an overwhelming majority of the Northern people, and was hearkening to the almost unanimous voice of those who represented their great moral and material interests; that no act of his hastened or encouraged the outbreak of hostilities, and that nothing he might have done, and left undone, could have checked, prevented or suppressed the rebellion and the ensuing war; that Mr. Lincoln's utterances against force, invasion of Southern territory and resort to arms, from the time of his election until his inauguration, were much more emphatic for peace and conciliation than Mr. Buchanan's; that a Republican House of Representatives and Congress, as a whole, during that period, did nothing, and did not offer to do anything, to justify or support the president in assuming any other attitude toward the South or its rebellion than he assumed—in short, that Mr. Buchanan did no less than Mr. Lincoln would or could have done in his place during those four months, and Mr. Lincoln did, dared and said nothing before, at and immediately after his inauguration to show he was not in full accord and sympathy with the policies of the Buchanan administration.

As to the general proposition of acknowledging the right of secession or the policy of disunion, there is not to be

found a line or letter in any document Mr. Buchanan ever wrote, or in any speech he ever uttered, to justify such an aspersion. While extremists North and South concurred in this view, he never entertained nor countenanced it. He was a Jackson Democrat from start to finish, and went the whole length of that warrior-statesman in antagonism to Calhoun's doctrine of nullification—which must not be confounded with secession. Some of the most eminent representatives of Southern sentiment, like Jefferson Davis, who believed in the right of secession, disputed nullification; and others—like Alexander H. Stephens and John B. Floyd—who conceded the right of secession, had consistently demonstrated the political and economic folly of its exercise. Howell Cobb, in his canvass for Governor of Georgia, had made an able and powerful argument against the right of secession; and Mr. Buchanan himself records that this was the principal reason he selected Cobb for a seat in his cabinet.

On the other hand, there can be no mistake about the strong sentiment of the Abolitionists and the New Englanders generally, of such advanced leaders as Josiah Quincy, and John Quincy Adams, in their time, and of Horace Greely, William H. Seward, Henry Ward Beecher, William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, of a later day, that secession was right and disunion was desirable.

It was in Massachusetts, not in Alabama; by the Abolitionists, not the Democrats; led by Garrison, not by Davis, Toombs or Yancey—that the Constitution of the United States was publicly burned; the few hisses and wrathful exclamations that the deed drew forth were overborne by a thousand shouts of "Amen." It is an indisputable historical fact that when the extreme anti-slavery Northerners felt the constitutional contract and the final judicial construction of it warranted not only the existence of human



slavery, but its extension into the territories; that the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law was a duty imposed upon the States and on their people, and that there was no legal escape from these logical conclusions, they were quite ready to declare the Federal Constitution a "league with death, and a covenant with hell;" to "half mast the starry flag, tear down the flaunting lie;" and to submit to a dissolution of the compact of the States. It is reasonable to suppose that had the law been, or had it been construed to be, otherwise, the Southern extremists would have been just as disloyal and refractory, for it is as true of the righteous as of the rogues that they ne'er feel the halter draw, "with good opinion of the law."

It is quite true, the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions of 1798 and 1799 declared the rights of States to nullify Federal statutes; but the Federalists, in opposing the annexation of Louisiana and the war of 1812, and the Hartford Convention of 1814, proclaimed the right of secession in even more defiant terms; and down until the thunder of hostile cannon shook the land, the great body of Northern Abolitionists believed in the political preaching of Jedidiah Morse, that New England should get out of the Union to get rid of slavery.

On the other hand, John C. Ropes, whose "Story of the Civil War" is probably the fairest and keenest of like dimensions yet written, says not a word dropped from Buchanan's lips to encourage the Southern hope "that the North would consent to a peaceable dissolution of the Union;" "nor did he ever yield an iota on the point of the abstract right of the Federal Government to maintain its hold on all the Southern forts."

### ALL SECTIONS OPPOSED TO WAR.

None the less, the great mass of the people, North and South, were neither for disunion nor for war. They were favorable to almost any compromise on the slavery question that would preserve peace and union; and Mr. Lincoln, long after the war began, expressed the popular notion when he said that if he could save the Union by destroying slavery he would destroy it, but that if he could save the Union by continuing slavery he was for its continuance. His inaugural pledged him to enforce the fugitive slave law.

I am not now concerned to inquire whether this view was sagacious or ethical, humane or even statesmanlike. My proposition is that in the winter of 1860 and 1861 it was the view of the great majority of the Northern people; that Mr. Lincoln reflected and espoused it as fully and sincerely, and expressed it as freely and unmistakably, as Mr. Buchanan; and that it is a shallow, false and wicked judgment which reprobates the one as cowardly and senile and praises the other as brave and sensible for cherishing the same notions, even though they were erroneous.

I hasten to the support of my second proposition, that they concurred in their views as to what was then discussed as the right and policy of "coercion." The expiring Thirty-sixth Congress met less than a month after Lincoln's election. That House was in full control of the Republicans, and they had elected the next Congress. Within three months they would be in complete power. Mr. Buchanan has been chiefly denounced for the tone of his annual message to that Congress. Not a blow had been struck; no State had passed an ordinance of secession; the North did not believe the South would secede; the South did not believe the North would fight. The discussion was as yet only academic.

Nevertheless, the New York "Tribune," whose editor was the most potential force in nominating and electing Mr. Lincoln, and which newspaper was "the most powerful organ of its party," declared three days after his election: "If the cotton States shall decide that they can do better out of the Union than in it, we insist on letting them go in peace. The right to secede may be a revolutionary one, *but it exists nevertheless.* \* \* \* We shall resist all coercive measures." These views were reiterated from day to day. They were re-echoed by the Albany "Evening Journal," edited by Thurlow Weed, the nearest friend of Mr. Seward. Henry Ward Beecher, in his famous Boston speech, declared, about the same time, "I hold it will be an advantage for the South to go off." Gen. Scott, who had been a Whig candidate for president, who was the Commanding General of the Army, and who later became one of Mr. Buchanan's severest critics, in his famous "Views," of October, 1860, had said: "To save time, the right of secession may be conceded." In March, 1861, when he was most intimate with Secretary Seward, and was discouraging the relief of Sumter, he urged the North to say to the seceding States, "Wayward Sisters, go in peace."

If Mr. Lincoln antagonized these notions, he at least made no serious sound nor sign. He was the rising sun; Buchanan was an evening star; and any views a retiring president might have had to express would have been cold and feeble rays by contrast with the bursting effulgence of the great orb of day. If the clarion call to battle was to be then sounded, it ought to have emanated from Springfield; if there was a demand for a Jackson, he should have ridden, like "Young Lochinvar," "out of the West."

Nevertheless, while the leaders of Mr. Lincoln's party, and the chieftains of his campaign, were thus proclaiming the right of disunion and encouraging the South to secede,



11 Mr. Buchanan declared in his message that grave danger threatened the country against which he had long sounded warnings; he prayed God to preserve the Constitution and the Union throughout all generations; with courteous regard for his successor, he proclaimed that he had been fairly and constitutionally elected, and that his success justified no revolution; he recognized guarantees that Mr. Lincoln "would not attempt violation of any clear constitutional right." He stated the doctrine of secession and denounced it as "wholly inconsistent with the history as well as the character of the Constitution," and cited Jackson and Madison, Southern statesmen, to contravene it. With fine touches of eloquence, he said:

"This government, therefore, is a great and powerful government, invested with all the attributes of sovereignty over the special subjects to which its authority extends. Its framers never intended to implant in its bosom the seeds of its own destruction, nor were they at its creation guilty of the absurdity of providing for its own dissolution. It was not intended by its framers to be 'the baseless fabric of a vision,' which, at the touch of the enchanter, would vanish into thin air, but a substantial and mighty fabric, capable of resisting the slow decay of time, and of defying the storms of ages."

Again he said:

"The fact is, that our Union rests upon public opinion, and can never be cemented by the blood of its citizens shed in civil war. If it cannot live in the affections of the people, it must one day perish. Congress possesses many means of preserving it by conciliation; but the sword was not placed in their hand to preserve it by force.

"But may I be permitted solemnly to invoke my countrymen to pause and deliberate, before they determine to destroy this, the grandest temple which has ever been dedi-

cated to human freedom since the world began. It has been consecrated by the blood of our fathers, by the glories of the past and by the hopes of the future. The Union has already made us the most prosperous, and ere long will, if preserved, render us the most powerful nation on the face of the earth. In every foreign region of the globe the title of American citizen is held in the highest respect, and when pronounced in a foreign land, it causes the hearts of our countrymen to swell with honest pride. Surely, when we reach the brink of the yawning abyss, we shall recoil with horror from the last fatal plunge.

"By such a dread catastrophe, the hopes of the friends of freedom throughout the world would be destroyed, and a long night of leaden despotism would enshroud the nations. Our example for more than eighty years would not only be lost, but it would be quoted as conclusive proof that man is unfit for self-government."

I might quote many like passages throbbing with the loftiest patriotism. Certainly no man can recall them without feeling that the touching and oft-quoted sentiments of Mr. Lincoln's inaugural reached no higher plane of patriotic sentiment and touched no deeper chord of popular feeling. George Ticknor Curtis, a Yankee of Yankees, who had argued the Dred Scott case for the slave, declares: "After a long familiarity with our constitutional literature, I know of no document which, within the same compass, states so clearly and accurately what I regard as the true theory of our Constitution as this message of President Buchanan. Had I the power to change it, I would not alter a word." It may be said that Mr. Curtis was the paid biographer of Mr. Buchanan; but he was also the biographer of Mr. Webster, and he had a reputation as a constitutional lawyer that he would not risk for any paltry reward of political literature.

### NEITHER TIMID NOR WEAK.

Meantime, as conditions changed, the situation became more alarming. States seceded, Congressmen withdrew and cabinet ministers who sympathized with secession quit or were forced out of his cabinet, but Mr. Buchanan only persisted and became correspondingly more emphatic in his acts and utterances. There was, however, no reversion nor inconsistency in the executive position—neither timidity nor show of weakness. In his special message of January 8, 1861, he repeated his conviction that “no State has a right by its own act to secede from the Union or throw off its Federal obligations at pleasure.” While he declared, in almost the same terms that Mr. Lincoln adopted—months later and when the rebellion was far more advanced—that he “had no right to make aggressive war upon any State,” he declared, on the other hand, in words that his successor, sixty days later, almost identically appropriated, “The right and duty to use military force defensively against those who resist the Federal officers in the execution of their legal functions, and against those who assail the property of the Federal Government, is clear and undeniable.” Lawyer and statesman as he was, he knew the limitations upon the executive, and what were the constitutional prerogatives of the legislative branch of government. He had taken a solemn oath to regard both these, and he was liable to impeachment and subject to disgrace if he did not. He declared Congress, which was in session, to be “the only tribunal under Providence possessing the power to meet the existing emergency.” He said: “To them, exclusively, belongs the power to declare war, or to authorize the employment of military force in all cases contemplated by the Constitution; and they alone possess the power to remove grievances which might lead to war, and to secure peace

and union to this distracted country. On them, and on them alone, rests the responsibility."

In his views and in his manner of expressing them, the president not only had the advice and cordial approval of his Attorney-General, Jeremiah S. Black—to whom Rhodes gives unstinted praise for purity, patriotism, statesmanship and legal learning—but what is far more to our present purpose, all that Buchanan then said and all he did had the legal, cordial and unqualified support of three other members of his cabinet, who subsequently became most illustrious leaders of the Republican party, Edwin M. Stanton, the great War Secretary—the erection of a statue to him has just been recommended by Secretary Taft; Joseph Holt, to whom, after eminent service, Lincoln offered the Attorney Generalship; John A. Dix, later a Major General, Republican Governor of New York and Ambassador to France—and yet best remembered because, as a Democrat, and from his seat in Buchanan's cabinet, he sent out that thrilling message, "If any man hauls down the American flag, shoot him on the spot." Judge Holt is on record as testifying that Mr. Buchanan's official labors ought to be crowned by the glory that belongs "to an enlightened statesmanship and unsullied patriotism."

Not only did they all accept, approve and stand by their chief's public declarations, but they remained in his confidence and trusting him until he took his seat beside Mr. Lincoln in the carriage which bore them to the ceremony of transferring the presidency. It is inconceivable that these eminent loyalists and high-minded gentlemen could have stayed in his political household if he was the base and timid creature whom partisan historians have pictured and pilloried. Whether he dominated them or subjected himself to their guidance, it is an indecent judgment that stigmatizes the administration of which they were all members as "weak" or "disloyal."

Meantime, what answer was Congress, with a Republican House of Representatives, making to the executive alarms and appeals? For three months, to the last day of his administration, that body remained in session; and Buchanan exhausted all power he had over its successor by calling an extra session of the Senate, to meet March 5, 1861. While the outgoing Congress repudiated all proposals of compromise to prevent civil war, it took no measures whatever to retain the cotton or the border States within the Union. It heard of one State seceding after another, and witnessed the withdrawal of member after member of Congress. The senators who had listened with "cold neutrality" to Jefferson Davis's vindictive attacks upon Mr. Buchanan, for denying the right of secession, sobbed with personal sympathy when Mr. Davis delivered his famous and pathetic speech of withdrawal from association with his colleagues. That even then this most conspicuous of Southern leaders was not without hope of a peaceful reconciliation is attested by a touching domestic annal, recorded by Mrs. Davis: "Inexpressibly sad he left the Senate chamber with faint hope; and that night I heard the oft-reiterated prayer: 'May God have us in His holy keeping, and grant that before it is too late peaceful counsels may prevail.'"

### AN INACTIVE CONGRESS.

It makes nothing against Mr. Buchanan's policy to undertake to justify the inaction of Congress by the tremendous political and popular efforts then making in every quarter to effect a compromise and avert war; or by the very general belief that any aggression by Congress would fan into conflagration a flame, otherwise soon to flicker out. Certainly if the only branch of government to which are entrusted the raising of money, the equipment



of armies and the declaration and carrying on of war remained inert, after repeated warnings, no right nor power existed in the president to supplant or even supplement it. All the more was this the case in view of the fact that a new executive was so soon to be inaugurated and a new Congress qualified.

It must also be remembered that although the Federal statutes then gave the executive power to call forth the militia to suppress insurrections against a State Government, no such power existed to suppress insurrections against the Federal Government. This omission was permitted to exist until after the end of Mr. Buchanan's term; its grant to Lincoln, by the Act of July 29, 1861, was evidence of the necessity for it. Every request for like power to President Buchanan was ignored; and even after forts and mints had been seized, and the aggressions begun which he always declared would justify defensive warfare, a bill to give the president power to call out militia or accept volunteers to protect and recover military forts, magazines, arsenals and other property belonging to the United States was withdrawn the same day it was reported—killed as soon as it saw light. Four bills in all to furnish the president with military means to provide for the collection of duties at Southern ports of entry were introduced and not one of them was passed.

Nor let it be forgotten that when President Jackson grappled with nullification, a patriotic Congress gave him the "Compromise Act" and "Force Bill", which enabled him to act with vigor and success. These powers expired by limitation in 1834, and what had been given to Jackson then was persistently denied to his loyal follower in the executive chair in 1861. A striking contrast of legislative support to the executive is afforded by the alacrity with which Congress strengthened Madison's hands, in 1812;

likewise the wild rush with which a later Congress led, if it did not drive, McKinley to war with Spain.

In the face of these historical facts, what a pitiful subterfuge to lay the blame of the war or the earlier successes of the Confederacy to the deliberate dispersion of the army and navy, the surrender of forts and stores and the plunder of the arsenals—with connivance of the Federal administration! I pause with little patience to refute these well-worn lies. Any student or inquirer who really wants to get at the truth can easily reach the head-waters; though it is certainly discouraging to see how recklessly the falsehood persists. Mr. Buchanan effectually refuted it in his book, published in 1865; Judge Black apparently stamped the life out of it in his unanswerable letters to Henry Wilson; as early as 1861, a Republican committee of a Republican House, organized to convict ex-Secretary Floyd, the very head and front of this offending, reported the case not made out, its chairman expressed the opinion that the charges were founded in “rumor, speculation and misapprehension.” The facts were that of the useful muskets distributed by the Government in 1860, the Northern States received three times as many as the Southern; of the rifles, there were divided in all between six Southern States scarcely enough in the aggregate for half a regiment. Two years before Lincoln was elected the Government had condemned as worthless and unserviceable 500,000 muskets—and after nobody could be induced to buy them at any price, less than one-third of these condemned weapons were shipped to Southern arsenals, in order to make room in Northern storehouses for useful and effective arms. As their recoil was worse than their discharge, the North would have been lucky had the Confederates got the whole of them. The story of the cannon surreptitiously shipped from Pittsburg to Galveston is best answered by a resolu-

tion of the Northern City's Councils, officially thanking Buchanan, Black and Holt for *preventing* any such shipment. Mr. Rhodes, after careful investigation of the whole story, unhesitatingly accepts the refutation of these long-lived canards. Gen. Samuel W. Crawford, one of the few who were in Fort Sumter when the flag went down, and again when it was hauled up, in his "Genesis of the Civil War," also demonstrates their falsity.

The idea that the naval arm of the government's power was disarranged to favor secession has not the slightest historic foundation. The head of that department was a New England Unionist, Isaac Toucey. He was a man of utmost loyalty and highest integrity. Every attempt by official investigation failed to discredit him. He fully satisfied a hostile Senate Committee that at the outbreak of Secession our squadrons at foreign stations were feeble; they had not been augmented in proportion to the increase of our commerce; none of them could have been diminished without sacrificing its safety and the interests and safety of those engaged in it. While the nation was praying and protesting that war might be averted, to have recalled our foreign squadrons certainly would have been "lunatic rashness;" and it would only have helped to "make trouble," without contributing to its suppression or relief.

One of the most frequent of the reckless accusations against Mr. Buchanan is that when the Federal office-holders in the seceding States abandoned their places, he did not promptly fill them. He repeatedly demonstrated to Congress that he could get no other citizens of these States to take the offices and discharge their duties; but, as Mr. Rhodes frankly points out, when he named for Collector of Charleston, Peter McIntire, of Pennsylvania, an eminently fit man, of high courage and decision of character, the Senate never acted on the nomination; and, in brief, no



Congressional aid whatever was extended to the president in any effort to avert war, effect compromise, defend the government property, re-take military stations or fill the abandoned posts of civil duty.

### THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE.

But if the action—or rather, the non-action—of Congress justified the attitude and conduct of the administration in those days of doubt, how immeasurably more was it the reflection of and backed by the overwhelming voice of the people, all over the North, and manifested in so many and various forms?

While the venerable Crittenden was so strenuously urging upon Congress the adoption of his compromise measures, the country waited patiently to see if Mr. Seward—destined to sit at Mr. Lincoln's right hand—was to unite the genius of Clay for compromise with the enthusiasm of Webster for the Union. The radical Republicans of the North, and the fire-eating Secessionists of the South, were alike disappointed, and no authoritative voice from the new administration commanded attention or following.

John Sherman says: "At this time the public mind in the North was decidedly in favor of concessions to the South. The Democrats of the North would have agreed to any proposition to secure peace and the Union, and the Republicans would have acquiesced in the Crittenden compromise or in any measure approved by Lincoln and Seward."

Had the incoming Lincoln administration then declared for compromise, there would have been no war. Had it declared for effective and aggressive measures of coercion, it would only have hastened the outbreak of hostilities at a time when the country was even less prepared for and more averse to it than when Sumter was fired upon. How-

ever, the oracle was dumb—and nothing that can be said in denunciation of Buchanan's vacillation and uncertainty cannot be said with far more truth and more force of Mr. Lincoln, of those who had been his chief supporters and of those who were about to become his Cabinet Council.

Another illustration of the preponderating public desire—North and South—to avert war is found in the response which answered Virginia's call for a Peace Congress. Twenty-one States sent commissioners to assemble on the same day that only six of the Cotton States met to form the Southern Confederacy. The Peace Congress was made up of men of "character, ability and distinction." One of the Pennsylvania delegates was our own late townsman, Hon. Thomas E. Franklin. An eminent lawyer, a man of property, lineage and high social position, a churchman and a Republican in politics, he was a fine type of the best citizenship of that day. The "plan of adjustment" this conference agreed upon was not accepted with favor by Congress. I do not refer to it in approval, but only to further illustrate the earnest, organized, official efforts making for peace. For a president to have arrested or disturbed them by precipitate call to arms would have been met with overwhelming rebuke and indignation; it could only have weakened the Union cause and invigorated the aggressions of the Disunionists. Absolute proof of this contention is afforded by the contemporary expressions of popular opinion, and by the utterances not only of Mr. Lincoln, on his way from his Illinois home to the White House, but from the lips of men who already were, or were to become, pillars of his administration and party. Gen. Daniel E. Sickles, who is the only living member of that memorable House of 1860-1, and who became a Union hero and a Republican martyr—threatened that the secession of the Southern States would be followed by New York

City; Gen. Dix concurred; Senator Simon Cameron—Lincoln's first Secretary of War—was desirous of saving the Union and preserving peace "at the sacrifice not only of feeling, but of principle."

All reliable authorities agree that up to, and for a considerable time after, the end of Mr. Buchanan's term, a large majority of the people of the North, and a very considerable portion of the South, were earnestly for peace—at almost any price. Tumultuous popular assemblies all over the North loudly voiced this demand. In the Republican city of Philadelphia, in Independence Hall, where American freedom was born, Bishop Potter blessing the gathering and the cause, and Mayor Henry presiding, eloquent orators of all parties were cheered to the echo when they pleaded and declared in town meeting for a policy of forbearance and protection to the slaveholders in their constitutional rights. In the city of Boston, head and heart of New England, Faneuil Hall, "the cradle of liberty," rocked with the surging oratory of like appeals. In the very recently published life—almost an autobiography—of William Pitt Fessenden, it is recorded that "in all the great cities, especially among public men, it was hoped that a compromise would be effected. \* \* \* Republican who favored a vigorous policy, seemed temporarily out of favor. Conciliation was the popular term. Mr. Lincoln believed that gentleness and a conciliatory attitude would prevent secession."

It is true that the voice of Senator "Zach" Chandler sounded discordant above the prevailing placidity; but his sanguinary expressions that "without a little blood-letting this Union will not be worth a rush"—like the gory demand of a Southern bravado that "we must sprinkle blood in their faces"—was generally regarded as incendiary and fratricidal—if not impious. Even the fierce and fiery

John A. Logan testifies that he "believed in exhausting all peaceable means before a resort to arms."

### FOR PEACE AT ANY PRICE.

Appleton's Annual Encyclopædia for 1861 estimates that of four million voters for president, over three million would have approved such a peaceable settlement of the difficulties as might have been satisfactory to all the Southern States whose complaints were founded upon questions connected with slavery. "*The voice of the people of the country at that time,*" this authority says, "was overwhelmingly in favor of conciliation, forbearance and compromise."

Thurlow Weed, the confidential adviser of Seward, urged concession and a constitutional convention. The New York "Herald" deprecated coercion and declared each State had the right to break the tie of the Confederacy and to repel coercion as a nation might repel invasion.

Nor did this prevailing condition of popular sentiment terminate with Mr. Buchanan's retirement. Mr. Morse admits that during all the three months in which his conduct has been so savagely criticised, one-half the people of the South were opposed to division; in the North everywhere words of compromise and secession were spoken; coercion was mentioned only to be denounced. Had the executive, he concedes, "asserted the right and duty of forcible coercion, he would not have found at his back the indispensable force, moral and physical, of the people." For over a month of the Lincoln administration this state of popular feeling continued, and up to the very time of firing on Fort Sumter, he says "the almost universal feeling of the people at the North, so far as it could be discerned, was compromising, conciliatory and strongly opposed to any act of war."

As late as April 5, 1861, Gen. Robert Anderson wrote, in a private letter, that he must take upon himself all the blame for the government not sending him relief. Had he demanded re-inforcements, he says he knows President Buchanan's Secretary of War would have dispatched them at all hazards; but he says he knew the coming of additional troops would inaugurate civil war; and his policy, he declares, was to keep still and preserve peace.

Because, then, "a little fire" ultimately kindled "a great matter," shall one be denounced as "timid" or "traitorous" because he strove to quench the spark, or refused to blow it into ravaging flame?

Surely it is not necessary to show that during all this period, and even later, Mr. Lincoln was in full accord with the policy of his predecessor and his own party; that he was alike submissive to and controlled by the manifest popular will of the Union-loving and peace-seeking part of the country. Neither one moved more slowly toward war than the other; and no faster in accelerating the outbreak of hostilities.

But to clinch a proposition which I earnestly maintain has been nailed fast, let us swiftly follow Mr. Lincoln's tour eastward. He said at one place—and I challenge you to find it more strongly stated in any of Mr. Buchanan's utterances—"The marching of an army into South Carolina without the consent of her people, and with hostile intent toward them, would be invasion; and it would be coercion, also, if the South Carolinians were forced to submit."

Remembering the declarations of himself and his party's platform against the lawless "invasion" of any State, what less or more could these words mean to the South than its people inferred from any declaration Mr. Buchanan had made?



At Columbus, Mr. Lincoln expressed much less solicitude about the future than President Buchanan was exhibiting. He said: "Nobody is suffering anything \* \* \* all we want is time, patience and a reliance on that God who has never forsaken His people." At Pittsburg he declared there was "no crisis but an artificial one," and predicted that if people only kept cool, the trouble would come to an end. In Philadelphia he assumed a decidedly anti-war tone: "There need be no bloodshed or war. There is no necessity for it. I am not in favor of such a course; \* \* \* there will be no bloodshed unless it be forced upon the government, and then it will be compelled to act in self-defense." "The crisis, the panic, the anxiety of the country at this time is artificial." At Harrisburg, when the speaker of welcome tendered him military support from Pennsylvania, Lincoln rebuked him, and said: "It is not with any pleasure that I contemplate the possibility that a necessity may arise in this country for the use of the military arm."

In none of these is heard the voice of the "Son of Thunder"—at no time the iron ring of the "Rough Rider's" hoofs. It is true, he said, "the right of a State to secede is not an open or debatable question," but Mr. Buchanan had said exactly this to Congress and the country two months earlier. The concluding words of the Lincoln inaugural are classic in the literature of eloquence; but in parallel passages with extracts already quoted from Mr. Buchanan's message, these latter may challenge comparison for sound law, lofty patriotism and even for rich rhetoric.

### MR. LINCOLN'S EARLY ATTITUDE.

The incoming president reiterated the pledge of his platform that each separate state had a right to control its own domestic institutions; he denounced the lawless invasion of the soil of any State or Territory by armed force as the gravest of

crimes. He gave his full adherence to the fugitive slave law and its enforcement, as guaranteed by the constitution. Strictly in accord with the policy and declarations of Mr. Buchanan, he promised there should be no bloodshed or violence unless forced upon the National authority; that Federal property would be protected and the Federal revenues collected, but, beyond what might be necessary for this, he declared there would be "no invasion, no using of force against or among the people anywhere." To the criticism that Mr. Buchanan had not filled the vacant Federal offices in the South, Mr. Lincoln then made an answer, that ought to be conclusive now: "While the strict legal right may exist in the Government to enforce the exercise of these offices, the attempt to do so would be so irritating, and so nearly impracticable withal, I deem it better for the time to forego for the time *the uses of such offices.*" Mr. Elson admits that this was a plain avowal that he would follow Buchanan's policy for the time in his attitude toward Secession.

The only significant act of the Congress just deceased had been to adopt a constitutional amendment practically making it impossible to ever abolish or interfere with slavery. Mr. Lincoln went out of his way to say not only that that was already implied constitutional law, but he set his personal stamp of approval upon it by saying, "I have no objections to its being made express and irrevocable." And yet for signing the measure which the noble Lincoln thus approved, the despised Buchanan is denounced by many so-called historians of the present day as a dough-faced dotard and a double-dyed dastard!

Surely when Thersites plays the role of Herodotus and Plutarch, Clio must hide her face in shame.

Old Richard W. Thompson, as garrulous as most men must be who boast and write "Recollections of Sixteen

Presidents," sees in Buchanan's peace policy an imitation of Nero fiddling while Rome burned; but Mr. Lincoln's similar temporizing is to the same dim eyes due only to "the promptings of his own generous nature" and the hope that his appeal to the reason and patriotism of the Secessionists would not be unavailing.

Is it any wonder Sir Robert Walpole said: "Anything but history for history must be false!"

It is often said that when Mr. Lincoln raised the flag over Independence Hall a new star glittered in the field; but the act admitting the thirty-fourth State was approved by Mr. Buchanan; and "bleeding Kansas"—so long the spoil of contending foes—alternately outraged like the Sabine matrons and slashed like the stainless daughter of Virginius—now quite recovered from her wounds and woes, without a furrow on her forehead or a ruffle on her raiment, quietly glided into the sisterhood of States at the pen stroke of a Democratic executive.

But if Mr. Lincoln was no advance upon Mr. Buchanan in aggressiveness and indicated no departure from his policy in the inaugural, how much more bloodthirsty and belligerent was his attitude during the month or more that passed before rebel guns boomed across the placid waters of Charleston harbor?

At the risk of having to tire your patience and confront melting ice cream and cooling coffee, for the sake of too tardy justice to a man long dead—and very dead—I beg you hear briefly the story of those five weeks; and remember how much further and with what long leaps Rebellion had advanced.

The most notable cabinet appointments were, of course, the Secretaries of State and of War. We have already seen how much further Seward was willing to go in surrender of the Union than Buchanan; and surely it was not so serious



a strain upon Cameron to "sacrifice principle" for policy—for in this respect he and Buchanan furnished life-long illustrations of opposing ideas of public duty and political propriety.

Nicolay and Hay give their subject credit for "infinite tact" in dealing with Mr. Seward; but is it permissible to find treason, cowardice and timidity in Mr. Buchanan's dalliance with incipient secession in the closet and yet praise the attitude of Seward and Lincoln in temporizing with full-armed Rebellion in the open?

John Sherman admits that the first forty days of the Lincoln administration was the darkest hour in the history of the United States. He declares that it was "a time of humiliation, timidity and feebleness." Sumner deprecated Lincoln's "deplorable hesitancy." Six weeks after his inauguration, Stanton wrote to Buchanan that there was a strong feeling of distrust in the candor and sincerity of Lincoln personally and of his cabinet. Emerson, with rare literary skill, condones the president's perplexities because "the new pilot was hurried to the helm in a tornado."

It is to the discredit of our political system—no particular reproach to Mr. Lincoln—that for months the chief concern of his administration was the distribution of the offices to clamorous partisans, rather than the distribution of troops to suppress the rebellion. The demands upon his time and the solicitation of his supporters were not to avert war, save the Union or suppress the rebels, but to lavishly ladle out patronage. Not only do Stanton, Schurz and Seward testify to this, but Mr. Lincoln himself said: "I seem like one sitting in a palace, assigning apartments to importunate applicants, while the structure is on fire and likely soon to perish."

With this disaster in prospect, we find, as late as March

12th, five of his cabinet ministers voting against provisioning Fort Sumter—and only one for it. Mr. Lincoln let them determine his course. And yet Buchanan was “weak” and his cabinet a “nest of traitors,” because they had not relieved and supported Major Anderson! As late as July 16, 1861, Stanton wrote to Buchanan: “Your administration’s policy, in reference to both Sumter and Pickens, is fully vindicated by the course of the present administration for forty days after the inauguration of Lincoln.”

Mr. Buchanan has been hounded from Dan to Beersheba, because three months earlier he had, with courtesy and dignity, accorded a single interview to the Commissioners from South Carolina. Before the year 1860 closed, he had peremptorily rejected their demands for the withdrawal of Federal troops from Charleston harbor; he had firmly declared to them his purpose to defend Fort Sumter by all the means in his power against hostile attacks from whatever quarter they might proceed; and a few days later, when they replied disrespectfully, he declined to receive their communication or to ever again see or negotiate with them. Later, through his Secretary of War, he warned South Carolina of the fearful responsibility it took if its authorities assaulted Sumter, and by periling the lives of “the handful of brave and loyal men shut up within its walls,” “plunged our common country into the horrors of civil war.”

And yet long after Jefferson Davis had been elected president of the Confederacy; and while its Congress was formulating plans to organize an army and navy; when State after State had wheeled into the secession column, Confederate Commissioners to the Lincoln administration came with confidence to Washington; though they were not formally received, they were in close touch with Seward; they remained long enough to get his assurances that the

evacuation of Fort Sumter was the arranged policy of the new administration. Mr. Morse is forced to admit that even later Mr. Lincoln gave the Confederates assurances that "no provisioning or re-inforcement should be attempted without warning"—and it will be remembered that the assault only began after he gave such notice. Secretary Seward was even then writing to Mr. Charles Francis Adams, our minister to England, the hopelessness of carrying on a civil war; and so distant seemed the danger of it, that Massachusetts, under the lead of her great war governor, John A. Andrew, as late as April 11, after having made military preparations for three months, practically disarmed the Commonwealth.

About the same time, Wendell Phillips declared the Gulf States had a right to a separate government and defiantly said: "You cannot go through Massachusetts and recruit men to bombard Charleston or New Orleans."

Even when Montgomery Blair—the only Jackson Democrat in Mr. Lincoln's Cabinet—urged that Fort Sumter be relieved, without reference to Pickens or any other Federal possession—and warned his chief that South Carolina would strike a blow at National authority from which it would take "years of bloody strife" to recover—Mr. Lincoln, with at least as great "timidity" and "indecision" as ever Mr. Buchanan had shown, sided with and acted upon the contrary advice of Seward, Chase and Cameron.

On April 13, the most Mr. Lincoln would say to the Virginia Commissioners was that he *might* repossess himself of the public property and suspend the mail service in the States then in defiant rebellion against the nation. He substantially repeated this in his subsequent message to Congress, which, be it noted, he did not assemble for four months.

And yet Mr. Blaine, who at times tries to be fair, thinks

if Buchanan had had Jackson's hickory will and Taylor's stubborn courage, history would have been changed. It is a little difficult to see why Lincoln could not have called these martial "spirits from the vasty deep" as easily as Buchanan; they would just as likely have come at one summons as the other—as readily in the balmy April spring days, when rebellion's crop was high in the stalk, as in the cheerless December time, when its roots were yet locked in winter's clutch.

### JUDGE BLACK ON MR. BUCHANAN.

Not to prolong my share in the argument—which we shall soon see has another side—nor to multiply illustrations from a copious, if not inexhaustible, fountain of authorities, I quote and adopt a summary of Mr. Buchanan's character and conduct from a source so much more authoritative and by a pen so much more skillful than mine, that no paraphrase could fail to mar it:

"The proofs of his great ability and his eminent public services are found on every page of his country's history, from 1820 to 1861. During all that long period he steadily, faithfully and powerfully sustained the principles of free constitutional government. This nation never had a truer friend, nor its laws a defender who would more cheerfully have given his life to save them from violation. No man was ever slandered so brutally. His life was literally lied away. In the last months of his administration he devoted all the energies of his mind and body to the great duty of saving the Union, if possible, from dissolution and civil war. He knew all the dangers to which it was exposed, and it would, therefore, be vain to say that he was not alarmed for his country; but he showed no sign of unmanly fear on his own account. He met all his vast responsibilities as fairly as any chief magistrate we ever

had. In no case did he shrink from or attempt to evade them. The accusation of timidity and indecision is most preposterous. His faults were all of another kind; his resolutions once formed were generally immovable to a degree that bordered on obstinacy. On every matter of great importance he deliberated cautiously, and sometimes tried the patience of his friends by refusing to act until he had made up an opinion which he could live and die by. These characteristics explain the fact that his whole political life, from the time he entered Congress until he retired from the presidency—all his acts, speeches and papers—have a consistency which belongs to those of no other American statesman. He never found it necessary to cross his own path or go back upon his pledges."

I have touched upon a single epoch of his public life—a brief three months of his official career—albeit, upon another and more fitting occasion I should not shrink from the task of maintaining the proposition with which, in 1883, his biographer concluded his work: "He was the most eminent statesman yet given by this great Commonwealth to the service of the country since the Constitution was established." I re-affirm this, after twenty-five years, notwithstanding Senator Penrose is a hopeful candidate for re-election; Senator Knox is even a less hopeless candidate for president, and the sculptor has nearly finished the heroic statue of Senator Quay, which is soon to add splendor to an already too splendid State capitol.

At the further risk of being tiresome and irrelevant, I must ask you to listen to a postscript. I have little faith in reported death-bed experiences. Dr. Osler has said that hundreds of recorded and reported cases, studied particularly with reference to modes of death and the sensation of dying, have satisfied medical science that the educated man at least dies usually "wondering, but uncertain, generally



unconscious and unconcerned;" and that the Preacher was right: "As the one dieth so dieth the other." And yet, somehow, fanciful as it may be, I like to think that the righteous man will realize the confidence of the Psalmist, "I will lay me down in peace."

From the time he left the presidency, Mr. Buchanan lived here among us. Many of the people of this town were no kinder to him than the historians have been, and quite as unjust. He outlived the storm of war, but while it raged, no unpatriotic sentiment ever fell from his lips or pen. In the fall of 1861, he wrote a public letter, appealing to a "loyal and powerful people" to sustain "a war made inevitable by the Confederate assault," calling for "brave and patriotic volunteers," and declaring that it was no time for peace propositions, but only for "prompt, energetic and united action" to support the president "with all the men and the means at the command of the country in a vigorous and successful prosecution of the war." He maintained that attitude until it ended. During its continuance, lest the publication might embarrass his successors, he withheld the defense and vindication which he was eager to print in 1861.

The progress of events and the revolutionary changes they wrought in our governmental system, if they inspired no public regrets, certainly suggested to him no private remorse. October 21, 1865, he writes:

"I pursued a settled, consistent line of policy from the beginning to the end, and, on reviewing my past conduct, I do not recollect a single important measure which I should desire to recall, even if this were in my power. Under this conviction, I have enjoyed a tranquil and cheerful mind, notwithstanding the abuse I have received, in full confidence that my countrymen would eventually do justice."

For this he may long wait; the judgment of his own conscience, I am sure, never tarried nor faltered.

### A DEVOUT MAN.\*

Mr. Buchanan, from his youth up, was a devout man. Born of positively pious parentage, the Scriptures were his "horn-book" and private prayer his daily habit. One of his most contemptuous—I almost wrote contemptible—critics flippantly complains that he once asked for time to take with him, to closet conference with his God, a vexatious public question. His fastidious horror of being made conspicuous long withheld him from making open profession of his faith. The late Rev. Dr. John W. Nevin was his spiritual adviser; they had long and solemn conferences on theology. Dr. Nevin says "*horæ vespertinæ*" they might be called—held, as they were mostly, in the autumnal twilight, on, what seemed to be for both engaged in them, "the utmost verge of time." His spiritual adviser has recorded that Mr. Buchanan "felt himself to be on the borders of the eternal world, and was fully awake to the dread issues of the life to come. But with all this, his spirit abode in quiet confidence and peace, and the ground of his trust throughout was the mercy of God through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. There was nothing like enthusiasm, of course, in his experience; the general nature of the man made that impossible. His religion showed itself rather in the form of fixed trust in God, thankfulness for His past mercy and general resignation to His holy will." Dr. Nevin's own counsel influenced his determination to associate with the Church of his ancestors.

In the early forenoon of a September Sabbath, 1865, in

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\*Adapted from "A Pennsylvania Presbyterian President," by the Author, Lancaster, Pa., 1907.



the rather gloomy basement of the Presbyterian Church, in Lancaster, five persons only being present, this singularly pure-minded man—now old and “broken with the storms of state”—with a career behind him such as none in the city of his home has ever had before or since, came, even as a little child, and the modest minute of the proceedings runs thus:

“Hon. James Buchanan, after being examined on his experimental evidence of piety, was admitted to the Communion and fellowship of this Church.”

An hour later, the same Lord's Day, in the sight of a then not numerous congregation, he who had risen from the humble home at “Stony Batter” to the first seat in the land, who had shone resplendent at foreign courts and had stood unabashed in the presence of earthly monarchs, with bowed head and before all the people, answered the soul-searching questions in terms that sealed him to the church on earth.

As he received from the sanctified hands of his humble townsman that first communion of the broken and bleeding elements, I doubt not that he, far more than any else of them, recognized and realized that no principle of constitutional government he had ever argued, as counsellor or Congressman, was so vital as the question he then decided. No pageant he had ever witnessed as ambassador was so splendid as that simple ritual. No treaty he had ever negotiated was so far-reaching as that solemn compact with his Maker. No mandate he had ever issued as chief executive was so tremendous in its personal importance to him as the message he that day sent to the throne of the living God.

For nearly three years he worshiped and communed in this church; and when the end came, he fell away into a gentle sleep, from which he barely woke to whisper the

short Christian prayer, "O! Lord, God Almighty, as Thou wilt." He had lived as a patriot should live; and he died as a Christian statesman should die.

"Altogether, it was a death-bed experience full of tranquil light and peace, the calm evening sunset of a long life, which seemed to be itself but the brightening promise of a new and far better life beyond the grave."

And so he "passed to where, beyond these voices, there is peace."















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